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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
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INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2016
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SUBJECT: ROSALES FOREIGN POLICY PLATFORM - CHIDING CHAVEZ

REF: CARACAS 003296

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary. Consensus opposition candidate Manuel Rosales has prepared a written foreign policy platform. It is a moderate and savvy alternative to President Chavez' anti-American foreign policy. Rosales pledges to prioritize relations with Latin America and "normalize" relations with the United States. A Rosales government would also rejoin the Andean community, refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, and stop the distribution abroad of Venezuela's resources. While the five-page document does not specifically address the BRV's close relations with countries such as Cuba, Iran, Belarus, and Syria, Rosales has made clear in his public pronouncements that he rejects ties with dictatorships, and is particularly dismissive of Cuba. He also briefly states his commitment to combat terrorism and narcotics trafficking. Domestic issues are far more important in the upcoming presidential election; nevertheless, Rosales appears to be scoring some political points by sharply criticizing Chavez' international conduct. End Summary.

Rosales Releases Platform

12. (C) Consensus opposition candidate Manuel Rosales released his platform October 25 at a public ceremony widely covered by the press (reftel). Rosales' foreign policy advisory committee of over 40 university professors and former diplomats drafted the five-page section called "A Foreign Policy for Democracy, Prosperity, and Peace." Former Accion Democratica (AD) legislator Timoteo Zambrano heads up Rosales' foreign policy team. Luis Ochoa Teran, an MFA Ambassador on extended leave from the MFA, is the executive secretary for this "parallel foreign ministry." Ochoa told

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poloff November 2 that Rosales' foreign policy platform was designed primarily to signal some general policy lines, leaving the details "for later."

Normalizing Relations

13. (SBU) Rosales promises in his platform to recuperate Venezuela's image as a "reliable and respected interlocutor"

and to reverse the BRV policies of "confrontation and breaking with our traditional allies and commercial partners." He also pledges to give priority to Venezuela's relations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Regarding the United States ("a friend and principal commercial partner"), Rosales states that he would try to increase economic ties and the "affinity associated with our common commitment to democratic values." At the same time, a Rosales government would be prepared to express "differences" with U.S. policies and international actions, as they arise.

¶4. (SBU) In order to address Venezuela's increasing "isolation," Rosales states that a Rosales government would rejoin the Andean Community, reactivate its work with Mexico and Colombia ("G-3"), and review the "irrational turn" toward Mercosur. He also pledges to end Venezuela's interference in the domestic affairs of other countries. The platform stresses Rosales' interest in strengthening economic ties with Venezuela's neighbors, particularly Brazil and Colombia, as well as commercial and cultural ties with Japan, China, and India. Rosales also pledges to seek new agreements with the European Union. While not mentioned in the platform, Rosales reportedly told the Venezuelan Confederation of Israelite Associations on November 1 that he would visit Israel.

Seeking Equilibrium

¶5. (SBU) The Rosales foreign policy platform does not specifically mention how a Rosales government would deal with the BRV's close ties with countries such as Cuba, Iran, Belarus, and Syria. The document does, however, criticize the Chavez government for aligning with unspecified "destabilizing countries and political movements" and pledges to put in place a "sane position of equilibrium" with respect to "geopolitical axes." In numerous previous statements, Rosales has made clear that he views Cuba as a dictatorship

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and believes the BRV's close relations with and support for Cuba are unworthy of a democracy and damaging to the Cuban people. Moreover, Rosales affirms in the document his commitment to multilateral institutions and international law, as well as his determination to combat terrorism, international crime, and drug-trafficking.

¶6. (C) Ambassador Ochoa told poloff that the Rosales campaign made a conscious decision not to comment on relations with Cuba in this document. He noted that the presence of tens of thousands of Cuban nationals who work in government social programs or ministries remains a "sensitive domestic issue" and a source of support for Chavez. Ochoa added that he believes a Rosales government would be disposed to try to repatriate or resettle Cuban nationals after a review of the existing social "missions." Ochoa also assured that a Rosales government would be ready to cooperate bilaterally and in the region to combat terrorism.

Economic Integration

¶7. (SBU) The Rosales platform is vague on international economic policy. While endorsing greater hemispheric and regional economic integration, Rosales merely promises that all free trade proposals, including the FTAA, would be "debated openly" in coordination with other countries in the region. The document embraces globalization and free trade in principle, but based on "justice and international equality" with special mechanisms that favor "the smallest economies." The platform also calls for a "dialogue" between developed and developing countries to, among other things, foment technology transfers and introduce "compensatory mechanisms" for financial "asymmetries."

18. (SBU) On energy, Rosales pledges to reinstate Venezuela's role as a "trustworthy and safe" supplier of oil to its "traditional clients" and to end the "populist distribution" of Venezuela's resources to other countries. Rosales also states his intention to include efforts to diversify Venezuela's "strategic associations" with other Latin American countries, the Caribbean, and with "new partners" in Asia and Europe. He notes that a Rosales government would favor a policy of "equilibrium and cooperation" within OPEC.

Taking Back the Foreign Ministry

19. (C) In addition, the Rosales platform pledges to rescue the Foreign Ministry from Chavez' "partisanship and militarization" and to restore the Foreign Ministry's professional role in "planning and executing" Venezuela's foreign policy. Ambassador Ochoa told poloff there are no clear front-runners for Foreign Minister should Rosales score an electoral upset on December 3. He also said he would expect that a Rosales government would allow many former diplomats who were fired, retired, or put on "plan pajama" by the Chavez government to return to work at the Foreign Ministry.

Comment

110. (C) Regularly criticized by Chavez as a "lackey of the empire," Rosales has been careful not to align himself too closely with the United States. Rosales told reporters early in the campaign that he is "neither with the bearded ones (Cubans), nor with Bush." There is no question, however, that the foreign policy of a Rosales government would be a vast improvement for the USG over President Chavez' Bolivarian extremism. Were Rosales to score an unexpected upset electoral victory over Chavez, we do not doubt that he would move quickly to realign Venezuela's foreign policy with its more moderate neighbors in the region. While Venezuela's presidential election is being fought primarily on domestic issues, Rosales has had some success in transforming selected foreign policy differences into domestic political issues. He appears to be scoring some political points, for example, by repeatedly attacking Chavez' unbridled foreign aid give-aways.

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